

The World of Falconry

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The Magazine for Austringers and Falconers

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Editorial

This time of year is always a very exciting one for all those involved in falconry. The hunting season is well and truly over and now the anticipation of the breeding season and the possibilities it could bring are foremost in our minds. Our hunting hawks are all hopefully moulting well and what seems an interminable wait for the start of the new season has begun.

In the meantime we have the Falconry Fair, which has moved to the new site Ragley Hall this year. The Fair is a social event as much as anything else with an opportunity to meet up with other falconers and catch up with things. A new event along the same lines is going to be held at Jemima's centre at Newent in Gloucestershire. In conjunction with the UK Falconry Club the centre will play host to a two day event over the weekend of September 3rd and 4th and further details can be found in the news section of this issue.

I hope that our readers will find plenty of interesting material in this issue including an interview with the falconer and artist Carl Bass. Mark Williams from Canada has sent us one of his interesting pieces and it is hoped Mark will be contributing on a regular basis. I would like to thank all of you that continue to send in photos of your hawks and falcons and would ask those that are considering doing so to take the plunge. We want to hear your falconry anecdotes and share your photographs.

Hope to see as many of you as possible at the Falconry Fair.

As always, good hawking.

The Editor

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Front Cover Photograph: Bob Dalton

News

Painted Hoods by Martyn Brook

Martyn Brook, the well known and highly respected Wildlife and Falconry artist, is currently engaged in producing an extremely limited number of painted Dutch style hoods. Each hood will have both eye panels painted with a falcon or hawk depicted on one side and the relevant quarry species on the other. The total output is probably going to be around twelve of these superb miniature works of art and each one in the series will be signed and numbered inside by the artist. They will come in an individual display dome to both protect the hood and also to display it to its best advantage.

The first two hoods in the series will be on display at The Falconers Fair in May at the new venue of Ragley Hall. One can be viewed at Martyn's own stand and the other at Bob Daltons Falcon Leisure stand. These hoods will not only be an absolute pleasure to own but should also prove to be a very sound investment. The price for each of these stunning items is only £250.



Brook hood

The Kiezebrink UK Falconry and Hawking Event

The first weekend in September, Saturday the 3rd and Sunday the 4th, will see a new event arrive on the British Falconry scene. The inaugural outing of the Kiezebrink UK Falconry and Hawking Event, jointly hosted by The UK Falconry Club and The International Centre for Birds of Prey, will be staged at Newent in Gloucestershire. The ICBP at Newent was originally founded by the Late Phillip Glasier and was known formally as "The Falconry Centre". For a whole generation of falconers, not just restricted to Britain, The Falconry Centre became the spiritual home of modern falconry and is therefore felt by many to be a very suitable setting for such an event as this.

Discussions between the UK Falconry Club and Jemima Parry-Jones have eventually resulted in this new event joining the falconry calendar here in Britain. The timing is such that the end of the breeding season will be upon us and a new hawking season about to begin so it should prove to be accessible to as many would be visitors as possible.

It is hoped by the organisers that the event will bring together the world of British falconry by having the clubs registered with the Hawk Board together in one place, along with some International clubs, set against probably the most charismatic falconry backdrop possible.

Attractions, apart from the actual centre itself, will be many and varied with flying displays as well as a Falconry/Gundog display by professional dog trainer Mike Roberts. It is also hoped that some of country's leading artists, including painters Carl Bass & David Rampling and sculptor Martin Hayward-Harris will exhibit their works in an Art marquee. Additionally the or-

ganisers have lined up a series of lectures from the relevant leading authorities on raptor breeding and medicine as well as telemetry.

As with anything new in the falconry world in this country the event has already been the subject of Chinese whispers and crass statements with no foundation of truth in them. The general gist being that this event clashes and is at loggerheads with other events already staged, ie The Falconers Fair and The CLA Game Fair. This magazine is in no position to comment on the CLA, however this publication and its editor have very close ties with The Falconry Fair, which has served the falconry community well for over twenty years and long may it continue to do so, and are supposedly amongst a camp that do not think well of any new event coming along. I would like to state categorically in print that such rumours are precisely that, rumours, with absolutely no basis in truth what so ever. Like anybody with a genuine interest in the sport I welcome any new event and see it as another opportunity for the sport of falconry to unite and thereby give itself strength. I am equally positive that most of those organising the event genuinely care more about the future of falconry than any childish side issues. So I sincerely wish the event well and most certainly will be there. In our next issue, due for publication in July, we will take a deeper look at the event and what the visitor can expect.

For exhibitors wishing to take a stand at the event or for anyone wishing to enquire about advance tickets or anything else relating to the event contact the organisers initially by e-mail at jan.hart@falconryhawking.co.uk or neil@falconryhawking.co.uk

New Products

The innovative Masters of the Mews falconry equipment supply company have reworked a couple of their best selling items to improve them even further. The training blocks and revolving ring perches that they have marketed with considerable success for quite a while now have both been subjected to a critical review and updated accordingly. Both products have proved extremely popular and sell well but Del Shaylor, the company principle, felt both could be refined just a little further to enhance both function and looks. Accordingly now new versions of the training block are available and these are two feet from block to base and have a stainless steel tube around the stem to ensure the ring to which the leash is tied runs freely and cannot get jammed in anyway. Different diameter tops are available and prices start at £75 plus carriage.

The revolving ring perches have also had the stainless steel tube added to the stem and again any possible risk of a tangled leash is a thing of the

past. These training ring perches are available in four different heights from two foot from the base of the ring to the base of the stem through to five foot. Prices are £80 for the two foot version rising up to £95 for the five foot model. Prices are plus carriage.

Both products will be on "The Masters of the Mews" stand at the Falconry Fair or you can contact the company through the details on their advert in this issue.



The Puma Falknersheil

Puma is a name synonymous with the production of some of the finest hunting knives in the world. The German firm has long established itself as leader of its particular field and over the years has produced a series of knives that are relevant to different aspects of the field sports world. In the dim and distant past of the 1970's they produced a knife specifically for falconers with several unique features that made the knife an immediate success within the falconry community. The design of the knife itself had come to fruition after much consultation with a number of highly active practising falconers. As with all Puma products the knife was of the very highest quality and made to



last a lifetime. That is unless of course, as in my case, someone else decides it is far better to steal yours than to buy one of their own. By the time this occurred the knife was no longer being produced and therefore a replacement could not be purchased. That is not until now.

Puma have started production of the exclusive "Falknersheil" once again and they are available in this country at a price of £220 which is inclusive of post and packaging. To purchase one of these splendid knives or to find out more about them contact Jim Moss at Crown Falconry on 01246-237213.

Belgian Falconer Marc Pitteman's passion, other than falconry, is working with leather and making superb hoods in a very traditional manner. Marc is very keen that the traditional patterns, styles and methods of hood making are not lost and to this end is producing a very limited number of simply stunning hoods.

Unfortunately due to prior commitments Marc is unable to attend this year's Falconers Fair on May 1st and 2nd at Ragley Hall but a close friend of his will be bringing a selection of his work which can be seen on "The World of Falconry" stand. In the meantime you can go to Marc's page on facebook or contact him by e-mail on antec814@hotmail.com

Peregrine Falcon wearing traditional Dutch hood



Marc Pitteman

The Golden Eagle in Falconry

Regular contributor and avid eagle falconer Dr. David Fox has rapidly approaching completion on a comprehensive and relatively exhaustive work on the Golden Eagle and its place in falconry. The book is in its final stages of tweaking, editing and proof reading before going to publication. Eagles have been a major part of David's life for close on fifty years now and his personal enthusiasm for these magnificent raptors as well as his meticulous research show through on the pages of this authoritative work which I have been fortunate enough to read a draft proof of. Jemima Parry-Jones has contributed the forward and we hope to have a full review of this important work in the near future.



David Fox



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Caryospora (coccidiosis) in Falcons

Neil A Forbes DipECZM(avian) FRCVS



Young falcons in aviary

The most serious parasitic threat to captive bred falcons in all countries

Caryospora spp. (a protozoal coccidial gut parasite) are found in falcons, rarely in owls and only on exceptional occasions in hawks or eagles. *Caryospora* spp. (the most significant coccidial parasite of falcons), is the single largest parasitic threat to captive bred falcons. Although infestation has been demonstrated in wild raptors, it is reported to have a greater incidence in captive falcons.

Surveys of captive first year falcons in the UK, Germany and Middle East, have confirmed an incidence of 55-70%. So it is certainly a common and important problem. The majority of *Caryospora* spp. infestations in captive birds are acquired from their

parents whilst in the nest ledge. Most affected birds are less than 5 months of age, but disease may also be seen in older immune naive birds (i.e. those who have not previously

the infection), in particular if they are concurrently immune compromised.

Parasites succeed and multiply by 'not killing' their host and by finding a



Caryospora

Youngsters on nest ledge



way to ensure they are passed on from generation to generation. *Caryospora* spp. know when the adult bird is or should be breeding, and will automatically increase the level of shedding of infective eggs (oocysts), in the parents' mutes, immediately prior to that time of year. In so doing the parent birds' environment (aviary) is contaminated, such that any young whom hatch will inevitably become infected.

Whilst adult birds, who have previously been infected have a level of immunity against the parasite (which is constantly topped up by repeated

challenge by the parasite), young birds who have not previously met the parasite, have no such immunity. When they become infected, if they are fit and well they may gradually develop their own immunity. However if they are stressed in any way (food deprivation, weight loss, training, new ownership or husbandry – all things which are happening at about this stage of a bird's life), such that the birds' immune system is depressed, then the bird becomes clinically ill.

Clinical signs: typically comprise, reduced flight ability, abdominal

cramps, lethargy, fluffed up appearance, weight loss, inappetance, vomiting, brown or occasionally haemorrhagic diarrhoea, in merlins clinical disease is frequently characterised by severe diarrhoea or acute death in birds between 28 to 85 days of age.

Diagnosis: is generally simple. A faecal sample examined by an experienced avian vet, will instantly result in a diagnosis, the only red herring, is that on occasions the clinical signs associated with *Caryospora*, can arise up to three days ahead of when the parasite eggs (oocysts), are present in the faeces.

Treatment: whilst there are a number of recommended protocols, the only one shown scientifically to be more effective is toltrazuril (Baycox), to be given at 25mg/kg (i.e. 1ml/kg), once a week, for three weeks by mouth. The medication must be given directly into the mouth or crop, and as it is very bitter tasting (as it is a strong alkali), it should be mixed 50:50 with Coca Cola immediately prior to administration. This does not affect the efficacy of the medication, but it does reduce the chance of it being vomited back up.



Caryospora



Young falcon

However even toltrazuril does not always work. The bird's immune system should be high, (so ground the bird and push it's weight back up - this will help the bird to fight the infection and enable it to develop immunity). As *Caryospora* spp. has now been so wide spread in falcons for so many years, we are now also starting to see resistance to toltrazuril (as has previously occurred with other drugs). Currently trials are on going with newer, potential replacement medications.

As some 55-70% of young falcons suffer from the parasite, the author advises the owners of all new falcons to have their birds tested, preferably on arrival and again 3-4 weeks later. It is preferable to collect the dark part of the mite each day over a three day period, and then submit this for testing (via your own vet, or Great Western Exotic Vets – details above).

Prevention: it is a hard call, and perhaps not even advisable as the disease is so common, so that the chances of keeping a bird free of the disease through out its' life, are low to negligible. As one cannot predict at exactly what age a young falcon will become infected, one would in an ideal situation, expose your bird to a known volume of infection, in a controlled manner (e.g. vaccination), then medicate the bird during the incubation (pre-patent) period. In this way your bird will develop an immunity, but never be sick as a result of the infection. Sadly life just isn't that easy. There are at least 6 different species of *Caryospora* spp. which infect falcons; immunity against one species does not confer immunity against the others. Indeed the ability of a host (the bird) to mount an immunity, the strength and duration of that immunity is dependent on both the host and the parasite species. With some species of *Caryospora*, immunity is at best short lived and in some individuals will never develop (in particular if the birds' immune system is weakened).

Can I get rid of *Caryospora*: in reality once you have *Caryospora* on your site, you will not clear the site of it. Indeed you probably don't want

as the presence of it there, means your bird will repeatedly meet the parasite and keep re-vaccinating it-self naturally against the parasite. *Caryospora* spp. eggs remain infective in the environment for at least 2 years. There is no disinfectant which is effective against them in an aviary or weathering situation.

Take home message: do not ignore gut parasites, especially *Caryospora* spp., have your bird tested regularly, especially young falcons. Always test new birds, before they join others on common weathering, fellow falconers weatherings or aviaries. Mixing birds, or keeping them where others have recently (in the last 2 years) been is an ideal way to infect not only young birds, but also mature birds who may not previously been infected.

Neil A Forbes
 BVetMed Dip ECZM(avian) FRCVS
 RCVS and European College
 Specialist in Avian Medicine and
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22nd British Falconry and Raptor Fair

Once again the seasons have rolled round and The Falconry Fair is very rapidly approaching. This year will see a new venue playing host to the event with Ragley Hall acting as backdrop to the main arena. Ragley Hall in Warwickshire is no stranger to such events and last year hosted the CLA Game Fair which everybody agreed was an unqualified success. The superb parkland setting and ease of access from major motorways make the new venue a very exciting prospect. The previous venue always attracted criticism from those involved with flying displays that there was a natural draught on the site and that to put on a good display was difficult and indeed could be very frustrating. From several years personal experience of carrying out flying displays at Ragley Hall I can assure those that will be involved this year that they will certainly not face any such problems. The site has plenty of natural lift aided by stands of trees and open water. Just need to keep our fingers crossed for some decent weather.

The principal sponsors of the entire event will once again be long time enthusiastic supporters of the Falconry Fair, Kiezebrink UK Ltd. The company will have its normal stand welcoming friends old and new and this year has added a little attraction of its own. Kiezebrink UK Ltd has enlisted the services of Bob Dalton and Jemima Parry-Jones to give two separate demonstrations each day within the area of the company stand. One demo will feature imping and the other coping, both fairly basic husbandry skills that will be required by every falconer at some time or other throughout his or her career.



Bob Dalton

The main arena will see a very full catalogue of activities each day with flying displays obviously taking pride of place amongst the proceedings. These will be given by several of the very top drawer names in the world of falconry featuring Jemima again and also The South East Falconry Group. The South East Group are a club that has supported the Fair from its early days and their displays are always of a very high quality as well as being entertaining and informative. Under the chairmanship of Gary Biddis, who also always gives a first class commentary, the membership does an excellent job of promoting good falconry practices as well as the club itself.

The vast majority of falconers are aided and abetted in their sport by the use of a working dog and to this end another old friend of the Fair is Graham Watkins of Game Goer Gundogs. Graham is a very well respected working dog trained and has spent almost his entire working life training dogs for falconry as well as shooting. His displays are always

worth watching and there are training tips to be picked up even by the most experienced dog men amongst us. Whilst on the theme of canines what country show, no matter what its dominant theme, would be complete without the sound of a hunting horn and the responding singing of the hounds? Surely a pair of sounds that are synonymous with the countryside in general and hunting in particular and simply cannot fail to stir the blood. To this end Michael Sagar from "Hounds" magazine will be on hand to introduce some local packs and give us an update on hunting in general and the status quo of the packs featured. As always the display and parade of hounds will end with an opportunity for members of the public to come into the main arena and meet the hounds and the huntsmen. This never fails to draw a large crowd.

With all the excellent displays taking place throughout the day in the main arena it is all too easy to forget that these will be complimented by activi-



Jemima Parry-Jones



ties in a separate mini arena. Here there will be talks and demonstrations relating directly to various aspects of the sport of falconry going on and these will be under the watchful eye of The Yorkshire Hawking Club ably chaired by Dale Johnson.

An ever popular feature of the Fair is the weathering ground, containing as it does a large selection of trained hawks and falcons. This year will be slightly different in so much that there are two separate weatherings with an additional one being hosted and run by the eagle group of The British Falconers Club. This is being put together and co-ordinated by acknowledged eagle expert Dr. David Fox. The standard weathering will be just as varied and as good to look at and photograph as always and its security will as usual be in the capable hands of The Central Raptor and Falconry Club.

Clubs representing the sport at regional, national and international level will be present and clubs form the backbone of our sport, particularly the likes of The British Falconers Club which is the oldest of all and

was formed in 1927 from the ashes of The Old Hawking Club. As well as having a presence with the eagle weathering the club will have its normal stand alongside the main arena. Also around the main arena we will find the trade stands with just about any and everything connected with falconry or raptors on sale. Items such as gloves and bells through to

telemetry and incubators and everything else in between. Wildlife and falconry artists will also be well represented with the likes of Martyn Brook and Carl Bass amongst others exhibiting their wares. Images of the photographic kind will be on show from Falconry Fair regular Steve Magennis, the talented wildlife photographer.

There really will be plenty to see and do even for those who don't want to spend the entire day looking at hawks. There will be a craft fair, have a go at archery, fly casting, air gunning and clay pigeon shooting. Terriers and Lurchers will have their own shows and there will also be BASC gundogs and dog agility. Something for everybody has never been truer than in the description for this event. So Sunday the 1st and Monday the 2nd of May make sure you come along to Ragley and enjoy the fun. Admission is only £11 for adults and £4 for children with ample free car parking. For more details of the event visit the web site at www.countryfairs.info or call the show office on 01588-672708.





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Texas Hawking Association Field Meet – Abilene January 2011



out two or three days later, all being well. This was obviously not acceptable and after much arguing, head scratching and shrugging my companion and I were eventually transferred to a direct flight with another airline instead of having to route through Atlanta, but we had to get to Heathrow in a relatively short time to do so. We made the flight by the skin of our teeth duly settled back for the long, but fortunately now, direct flight to Houston.

Once safely through customs and immigration, which seems to take longer and longer these days, it was time to sort a hire car and get to the south east side of Houston and get a motel. This would be our base for a few days before making the journey across state to Abilene for the meet proper. We wanted to visit the Attwater Prairie Chicken Reserve and also go hawking with my dear friend Chuck Redding before going on to the meet. On the following morning, our first full one in Texas on this trip,

After the tremendous kindness and hospitality shown to myself and Diana Durman-Walters by members of The Texas Hawking Association at their 2010 annual field meet in Abilene, not to mention the very high calibre of sport, we were both determined to make the long trip back again for this year's gathering. I won't bore our readers with all the details of the horrendous journey but suffice it to say it started by turning up at Gatwick airport to be told bad weather on the Eastern seaboard of the United States meant that the airline hoped it might be possible to fly u s



Great Horned Owl



and go hawking with him and his intermewed passage male Red Tailed Hawk "Cisco". Chuck is a very dear friend but I do not let that colour my judgement when it comes to hawking so I can truthfully and without prejudice say that the Chuck/Cisco hunting partnership is an absolute pleasure to go out with. The rapport between falconer and hawk is simply amazing. Chuck hunts three times during a normal working week and then both days of the weekend. When "Cisco" has to travel with Chuck to work so that they can hawk together on the way home weathering space at the work place is somewhat restricted. Accordingly when

before continuing the weathering process.

This particular afternoon we had just over an hour and a half before the failing light would encroach on our hawking and so we set off over some very rough scrub ground looking for Cotton Rats and Swamp Rabbits. The going is tough and from his vantage point atop the T pole "Cisco" was constantly surveying the ground trying to detect the tell tale of movements of mammals within the scrub. As well as mammals this particular Red Tailed Hawk is also extremely adept at catching sparrows and let me tell you it is a great deal more fun

we headed westwards out of Houston towards the small town of Sealy and the Attwater reserve. The reserve itself is an amazing place of in excess of seven thousand acres of basically marshland and an absolute haven for a great many species of birds of prey. I have actually seen thirteen different raptor species there in a day and, it has to be said, still not the remotest sign of the elusive Prairie Chicken. After seven separate visits I am beginning to wonder if there are actually any there or indeed if there really is any such thing as an Attwater Prairie Chicken.

On this particular visit the morning was gloomy and damp and not very good for either bird spotting or photography but even so we still managed to get a decent look at nine different raptor species as well as many different waders and wildfowl as well as two species of Ibis. Also saw several large flocks of Sandhill Cranes which keen local hunters later described to me as "rib eye in the sky", as apparently they are excellent eating.

Having spent the morning watching birds of prey it was time to head back into Houston and meet up with



Miss Elbert, Red Shouldered Hawk

Chuck arrives at the hunting ground "Cisco" is turned out and allowed to go and weather where he wants whilst Chuck prepares telemetry, lures food etc. "Cisco" will go perch in a tree for a while, chase the local Red Shouldered Hawks in play and then take the sun from the top of a tall tree. When he is ready to fly he comes back close to Chuck, who then calls him down to the T pole and the serious business of hunting begins. Should "Cisco" wander too far for Chuck's liking during this self weathering process he simply calls the hawk by voice alone and unfailingly "Cisco" returns to a nearby tree

than it probably sounds watching such a large hawk really throw itself about and crash into cover trying to catch small birds.

The first four or five flights were indeed at small birds and they are frantic bursts of energy and power on the part of the hawk. Unfortunately all proved unsuccessful. On the way back from a failed sparrow flight "Cisco" suddenly folded his wings and dropped with a tremendous crash into some really thick cover. It was clear the hawk had something in his talons and this was confirmed by the fact that he was tearing bits off of



Sheldon Nicole



A superb Tundra Falcon on the weathering

whatever he had and was swallowing them. It turned out to be a Cotton Rat, something which wild Red Tails are particular fond of. By the time Chuck forced a path through the thick cover we were all in time to see the rear end and tail of the rat disappear down "Cisco's" throat. A Cotton Rat is a fairly decent meal for a male Red Tail and Chuck figured we had twenty to thirty minutes before the hawk would lose his enthusiasm as a result of having eaten one. So we immediately got on with looking for further flights and all too soon another Cotton Rat joined the first in the hawk's crop. Again it was killed in extremely thick cover and there was no chance of retrieving the hawk before the rat was consumed. We still pushed on and managed to flush a decent sized Swamp Rabbit. The hawk chased hard but was only just beaten by the rabbit to cover. As we crashed through the bushes trying to evict the Rabbit another one broke behind us and "Cisco" was off after it instantly. This time we saw the flip over and crash into cover his effort was clearly rewarded by the squeal of a Rabbit. Chuck crashed through the cover to assist his hawk with the large quarry, a good sized Swamp Rabbit is around five pounds, but just as he put a hand down to the Rabbit it broke free and got clean away. It was decided to call an end to the hunting and "Cisco" has his jesses, leash and swivel refitted and his feet and beak meticulously washed and cleaned by Chuck.

The following day we set off for the long drive to Abilene and decided to take a route we had not taken before in order to see some different countryside and hopefully wildlife. Accordingly we drove to San Antonio, scene of the famous "Battle of the Alamo", on towards Junction, followed by Eden, Ballinger and Tuscola before finally arriving in Abilene. My own powers of recollection



Kirk Williams

when once on the outskirts of Abilene as my sense of direction there returned to me and I was able to find my way to the meet hotel without any hesitation what so ever. The rather indirect route we had taken to get from Houston to Abilene had indeed been rewarded with some spectacular scenery and also some superb glimpses of wildlife. Racoons, possums, skunks and a couple of species of deer had all been clearly seen as well as Red Tailed and White Tailed Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Red Shouldered hawks, Black and Turkey Vultures, American Kestrels, a Merlin and a Great Horned Owl.

But for us Brits probably the weirdest sight was a group of wild Turkeys some twenty strong. To see them feeding quietly in a field and then moving on as and when ready really did seem very strange. However it did seem from the reaction to the car stopping in order for us to photograph them that they had been shot at from a car at some time or other. As we approached and the car was still actually moving they would remain feeding and unconcerned, the second the car actually stopped they took wing and moved several hundred yards.

That night saw us meet up with a number of falconers that had got to

the meet early in order to get some hawking done and enjoy the social side of things. The local steak house endured the customary mini invasion

with its normal good grace and a pleasant evening was had by all. The following morning I was keen to see the Red Shouldered hawk fly and accordingly met up with Chuck again and we went out with "Miss Elbert" looking for decent slips at Grackles. We found three reasonable chances in all and the hawk came oh so close to getting a foot to one and as a result of her determination and instant reactions she really did deserve more success than she actually enjoyed. But it was good fun never the less and I for one had certainly been guilty of underestimating the flying powers and determination of these often over looked hunters.

If you look carefully at the photos of "Miss Elbert" you will notice one side



A Prairie x Merlin

Diana Durman-Walters and Steve Duffy



of her upper wing area is somewhat bleached. This is as a direct result of finding out, quite literally first hand or more correctly first foot, that Skunks are not really a suitable prey item for a hawk of her stature. The resulting mess had to be cleaned off with a commercial preparation which contained peroxide and the results of the clean up are extremely plain to see. Skunk was not the only intended quarry item to leave an impression on the ever curious hawk. Two separate encounters with Water Moccasin snakes also feature highly in her list of dangerous encounters. The remarkable thing is that the first bite from one of these aggressive snakes very nearly killed her and it was touch and go as to whether or not she would survive. But survive she did and even went on a couple of months later to catch and get bitten by another one. By this time however her body had built up its natural resistance and produced sufficient antibodies to be able to cope with the venom which resulted in the hawk merely being off colour for a day or two instead of in a life threatening situation.

The following day saw the meeting proper begin and myself and my companion went out in the morning with Sheldon Nicole and Danny Pickens. Sheldon was flying an eyass

anatum and ducks were to be the quarry. We eventually found a stock pond with ducks and Sheldon allowed his falcon to take to the air. The previous day she had had a serious tangle with a Heron and wasn't being her normal self on this occasion. She went and sat in a tree for a while and then once out of it started to mount nicely but gradually drifted out of effective range in doing so. Twice she dropped low, came back over the pond and then went off and worked her way up again. On the third time of coming over, although she wasn't in the perfect position, the ducks were flushed and the falcon started to stoop. But it was evident she wasn't really committed and pulled out towards the end of the stoop. The ducks splashed noisily back down onto the water and this action seemed to excite the falcon, as so often can happen with young falcons, and she then spent several minutes trying to pluck a duck from the surface of the water. Needless to say the ducks were far too clever to let themselves get caught in this way and the falcon was eventually recalled to the lure.

In the afternoon we went out with Kirk Williams from Chicago who was flying a very experienced intermewed anatum female. As soon as she left the fist this falcon went off in

straight line till it find a column off air to assist it and was soon ringing up to a tremendous height. It was ringing up not merely thermaling and had used the spiral of air just briefly to give itself a head start. Soon it was difficult to see with the naked eye and had started to make its way back over the pond as the human element of the party was trying to get around and into a sensible position to flush. But the ducks felt under pressure and decided now or never was the time to go and, from a falconry point of view, were very unsporting and lifted early. The falcon reacted immediately and folded her wings putting in a magnificent stoop across the sky. It really was breath taking to behold and the ducks must have thought so too because a group of them decided it was safer on the water and tried to double back. But the Peregrine was now in full stoop and scythed through the air binding to one of the ducks and giving everyone a master class in flying and footing. Just magnificent. In fact it was so inspiring I watched the stoop from start to successful outcome and never gave a seconds thought to lifting my camera as the drama unfolded in front of me. It had been a wonderful flight that will certainly live in my mind for a very long time to come.

Back at the meet venue it was time to prepare for the evening talk, myself and Diana would both be giving a thirty minute talk each to those foolish enough to want to listen. I was going to talk on the major differences between falconry in Britain and the USA and Diana was going to talk about the domestic production of raptors. Our audience was extremely kind and seemed to enjoy what we did with plenty of questions and answers afterwards.

The next day saw us renew our acquaintance with Jack Brady, Marc Ellett, Jim Robinson, Jeremy Kessler

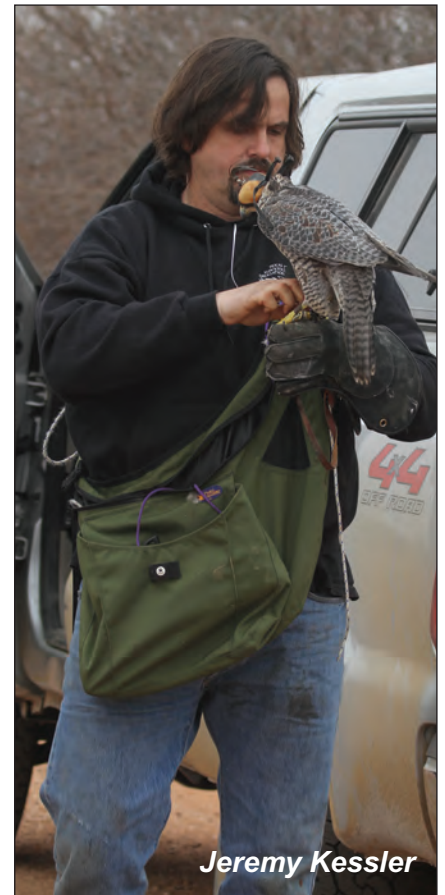
and Stephen Boydd, all of whom we had been fortunate enough to go out flying with the previous year. Jim was flying a new white Jerkin as his previous one had been killed in the field by a Golden Eagle. The other strikingly new addition to the team was in the form of an English Setter belonging to Jeremy Kessler, I can only say the man has impeccable taste when it comes to hawking dogs. We saw flying of the highest quality as usual with Jeremy being successful in the morning and Jack Brady's falcon Angel making a superbly stylish kill in the afternoon. The sport and companionship was of the very highest quality.

At the end of the days hawking it was time to get changed and head to the traditional Saturday night banquet. Here the evening got under way with some club business being taken care of and then, like a bolt out of the blue, a presentation to myself and Diana as a thanks for the talks we had given. Diana was presented with a pair of bells that had been made by Jim Ince and they really are excellent. I was fortunate enough to have been sent a pair by Jim a few years back and they ring as true now as the day I first fitted them to my falcon. I was kindly presented with a book, *The Art of Falconry* from Ara-

Westward by Ken Riddle, which had a personal inscription and had been signed by the members of the THA board and committee. I truly was very touched and for once in my life lost for words. It wasn't so much the book but the sentiment and spirit in which it was given. I was moved and very humbled by the experience.

After the presentations and before the banquet itself the gathering was treated to a talk and slide show by the accomplished falconer Jeremy Bradshaw. He has specialised in the flying of passage Merlins for some time now and his talk was certainly a fascinating one. Following the talk was the banquet and the raffle. Krys Langevin had done a superb job as always of organising a magnificent raffle with a stunning array of prizes both in terms of quality and sheer quantity. The evening was a very convivial one and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

On the Sunday morning myself and Diana were going out with Chuck Redding and Ron and Lynne Holder. Chuck would be flying "Miss Elbert" the Red Shouldered Hawk in the morning and "Cisco" the Red Tailed Hawk in the afternoon. Lynne Holder would be flying "Dart" an intermewed male Harris Hawk that had been passed on to her by Chuck. In fact



Jeremy Kessler

myself and Diana had been fortunate enough to see "Dart's" first ever kill on a previous trip to Texas. To get to the previously untried hawking ground we drove for around an hour and quarter North East of Abilene. On arrival it was fairly obvious to the experienced eye that there would not be a great deal to actually hunt and for the whole time we were there only one rabbit was briefly spotted and our mornings sport consisted of flights at small birds. However the cover was quite thick and the hawks had no real chance of taking quarry. We all decided to cut our losses and head back to the outskirts of Abilene where we knew we stood a very good chance of getting some decent flights. By the time we got to our second venue we knew we only had an hour or so of daylight left and so we got straight on with things. "Cisco" had a number of half chances and ended up catching two Cotton rats. "Dart" tried very hard and was certainly enthusiastic in his pursuits but just didn't quite get a foot to any



Steve Boydd

Jack Brady casts off Angel



quarry. Soon enough the light started to go and it was time to head back to the meet venue for a final farewell dinner. An impromptu affair that had the steak house reeling as forty hungry falconers descended on it en masse.

The next morning saw the vast majority of attending falconers heading out for home or hawking pastures new but fortunately for me I managed to catch up with Steve Oleson and get some photographs of his magnificent male Red Headed Falcon that he had been flying. I have a particular soft spot for these falcons as my own falconry career started out with flying a passage male Red Head. But whereas Steve's was of

West African descent my own first Red Head had been from India. Although later in my falconry career I did in fact fly several captive bred females from African lines. I was interested to know if Steve was concerned with the safety of the Red Head when out in the field due to its diminutive size and the abundance of larger wild raptors. But it appears the Red Head is somewhat feisty and makes a point of chasing off interlopers or those that he feels may be a threat. For me it was a shame I never got the opportunity to see the Red Head fly at the meet, but hopefully there is always next year. Steve is hoping to get a female and fly them in a cast, which is of course how Red

Heads will often hunt in the wild. The male tends to do the chivvying of small birds whilst they are in bushes and trees with the female snatching them as they break cover.

Diana and I decided to tag along with Chuck as well as Lynne and Ron Holder and do some hawking around the Fort Worth area before finally heading on back to Houston. The field we eventually arrived at looked very promising and Miss Elbert was first up and oh so narrowly missed making contact with a rabbit. Her reactions were very good indeed and it was only thickness of cover that saved the rabbit. This was followed by a number of attempts on small birds but with no success I'm afraid. Now unfortunately for the Red Shouldered Hawk this article is full of it nearly catching things but always falling short at the final hurdle. Let me express an opinion here and say that this was one very good hawk and it just so happened that that little element of luck needed for success just wasn't with her on this particular trip. But don't make the mistake of dismissing Miss Elbert as an also ran, she is very far from it.

Next up was Dart and Lynne and Ron asked for a little practical advice on how Diana and would work the situation if we were hawking it. So I proffered my thoughts as to the best way to actually work the ground and Diana stepped in with advice and encouragement as to how to work the dog with the hawk. Lynne has a Labrador that has a tendency to point and she is particularly keen to get Max the dog and Dart the hawk working together. The next forty minutes or so were a sheer delight and a couple of rabbits were flushed and chased as well as numerous small birds put under severe pressure. All too soon it was time to move on and complete our relevant journeys. So we said a temporary goodbye to Ron

Success for Angel





Anatum belonging to Jack Brady

and Lynne and spent another couple of hours following Chuck to a friend of his that is a rehabber and would be looking after Miss Elbert for a while. Having dropped the hawk off it was time to complete our journey back to Houston and get some much needed sleep.

The following afternoon it was back out with Chuck and Cisco again in familiar territory for us all and the hawk took two Cotton Rats and had a half decent chase at a Swamp Rabbit. The following day was an exciting one for myself and Diana as we headed down to Galveston to look at wild raptors and our efforts were rewarded with spotting ten different species in a matter of just a few hours. These included all the usual suspects as well as Ferruginous Hawks, an Osprey and a haggard Tundra Peregrine Falcon. At the end of our hawk watching outing we headed back through Houston and out to Sealy so as to be well placed for visiting the Attwater reserve in the morning and hopefully spotting plenty more raptors. Whilst at Attwater we received an invitation over the phone from Ron and Lynne to join them for some hawking at their home and spend the night. It was a relatively straight run from Attwater to

the Holder residence but once there the wind was howling and it was very cold. Unfortunately there would be no hawking that afternoon, but plenty of stimulating conversation instead and a look at the collection of animals and birds that share the Holder's home instead. One of my own personal likes is Donkeys and Ron and Lynne have nine of them, with one female being especially round and full bellied. I was assured this was merely a fat Donkey and not a pregnant one as it was getting on and had been recently checked over by the vet. Well the fat, non pregnant Donkey gave birth around six thirty am the following morning to a healthy male son and heir. So much for vets.

The weather had also decided to improve and as the morning progressed it was obvious we would be going hawking and so Dart and humans prepared themselves accordingly. Lynne's hawking ground literally backs onto her property and so we stepped out of the mews and began hawking. Dart was carried on a T-perch and was soon dashing here there and everywhere responding to movements he had detected. Max the dog was working quite well with the odd word of guidance from Diana

some fun. The outing ended with Dart taking two Cotton Rats and a Sparrow and all the humans thoroughly enjoying themselves. However one of the problems with carrying a hawk on a T-perch did manifest itself part way through the outing. Thought needs to be given as to which way the hawk is positioned when you are carrying it above you and it wants to mute. A short stop was required by Lynne and Diana to sort out the resultant mess and I am almost certain Ron and I didn't laugh too much. Having enjoyed our short but thoroughly pleasant stay with Ron and Lynne it was time to get back to Houston and spend the following morning with Chuck and one final outing with Cisco.

We met up with Chuck out by the Katy area just off of the Interstate 10 and the morning was very hot and wild raptors were out early riding the thermals. As we prepared to hawk I looked around the sky and with ease counted five Red Tails, three White Tailed Hawks, two Harriers and a large number of Black and turkey Vultures. As long as none of the Red Tails got too inquisitive there wouldn't be a problem for Cisco. Despite the growing temperatures we enjoyed some really good flying with several rabbit chases and some crashes into cover after Cotton Rats. The morning ended with two Cotton rats being the tangible result for the effort and energy Cisco had expended. But the fun and the company was first class.

All too soon the trip had come to an end and it was time to pack our bags and head for the airport. I will end this article by repeating my final thoughts from last year. For anyone contemplating meeting some genuine people and enjoying some first class company and falconry then you would be hard pushed to do better than attend the next Texas Hawking Association annual field meet.

Carl Bass

An Interview with the Artist/Falconer



Carl with Archie Grouse Counting on moor

WoF. Is your artistic talent something that manifested itself naturally at an early stage or was your potential spotted by someone else, such as a teacher at school, and then nurtured from there?

Carl. My artistic talent was always prevalent even as a youngster, I would at any opportunity be drawing, but as my abilities improved it was wildlife that I was compelled to either draw or paint and as I grew older so did my passion for the natural world. It was during my secondary school years that my talent became a real strength and it was helped along and encouraged by an art teacher whom I am still in contact with to this day.

WoF. Did you go to art school or are you self taught?

Carl. I attended college as a pre-empt to studying at university, the college course involved all aspects of design and within the criteria was an illustration module which I enjoyed with passion and later specialised in this area of the course. After this I attended University specialising in Environmental Illustration and so began my career as a wildlife artist.

WoF. At what point in your life did falconry come to your attention?

Carl. Falconry was introduced to me at a young age, as I attended a course at the Northumbria bird of prey centre which was a birthday present after having made the necessary additions at my parents home ie a suitable aviary, various equipment, hawk furniture and a food

yet exciting challenge of training my first hawk, a male Red Tailed Hawk of the year and he proved to be a superb rabbit hawk with a very determined nature. It was then that I realised that having flown this hawk, falconry would always play a part in my life and still does to this day.

WoF. What was your first intentional falconry experience and who or what was your greatest influence early in your hawking career?

Carl. The greatest influence in my early career was a friend, a fellow falconer and breeder, Keith Mills whom I had met through having attended the bird of prey centre as often as possible trying to gain as much experience as I could flying different species of hawks and learning all the time.



WoF. When it comes to your art has hawking and hawks always been your predominant subject or do we tend to see that side of your work more because of shows like The Falconers Fair?

Carl. Falconry has been a great influence in my career as a wildlife artist, and it has greatly helped me to become an established artist both nationally and internationally. Birds of prey are I admit my great passion both as a falconer and as an artist, and they do feature heavily in my work especially at the different falconry related shows we have available to us now. In particular The Falconers Fair and the much acclaimed International Falconry Festival, but I do paint all wildlife with the same passion and as an artist it pays to also paint and to think more commercially because although painting from the heart is a privilege I paint to earn a living, so painting from a more commercial perspective is also important.

WoF. Now that you are an established and well recognised artist do you tend to produce works from within yourself or do you tend to work mainly on commissions?

Carl. As an artist it is always a challenge trying to produce a piece both from the heart and also a piece which will appeal to all, and this can be difficult as there are different types of

clients out there who both collect and appreciate art for what it is, and as such I try to balance working on my commissions and working on pieces that I produce for exhibiting at the same time although more often than not I find myself working more on the commission side of things which keeps me on my toes and earns me a living.

WoF. What up until this point is your favourite work produced by yourself?

Carl. My very favourite painting to date is of a Bonelli's Eagle and Eaglet which I had the privilege of studying on a field trip to Portugal. It was this piece which helped establish my career, so for that I am grateful.

WoF. Which other artists, not necessarily falconry or raptor based, do you most admire?

Carl. There are a number of other artists for whom I have a deep admiration, these include Lars Johnson,





Evasion Tactics

Jonathon Pointer, Alan M Hunt and David Sheppard to name but a few.

WoF. How do you tend to view the falconry market when it comes to selling your work? Are falconers generally as reluctant to spend their money on art as they are on good falconry equipment?

Carl. Falconers as a rule can be a tough market to sell to although it is through these individuals I have experienced three sell out shows so I cannot complain. I think a lot is dependent upon the individual shows we exhibit at and the time of year it is. So either they have the money to invest in a painting say or they will be reluctant to spend anything at all as they have ordered a new hawk for the coming season. But I have always tried to price my work so it is accessible to everyone and not just for the rich and famous.



Peregrine Portrait

WoF. The freedom, in relation to time, of being a self employed artist obviously allows you to pursue your chosen field sport. What branch of falconry do you currently practice and does it fulfil your early hopes and expectations as a falconer? By that I mean I know several falconers that fly Harris Hawks but would fly a Goshawk or an Eagle if their circumstances were different. Same thing with some longwingers who fly Sakers or large hybrids but would prefer, given the ideal circumstances, to fly pure Peregrines or Gyrs.

Carl. I currently fly a male Finnish Gos at game and rabbits and feel quite privileged in the sense that I can wash my brush, pick up the gos, open the studio doors and walk straight onto my flying ground for a day's hawking. So yes being self employed has its bonuses. As for living the dream well that would have to be a move up to Scotland and having flown falcons previously then I would love to fly a Peregrine at Red Grouse. Best get some more paintings done then.

WoF. Is there any one flight with your own hawks that stands out in your memory?

Carl. The most memorable flight and hawk for me was a male hybrid falcon, a Gyr/Barbary, and although small with a flying weight of only 1lb 7ozs he certainly made up for this in having a big heart. He would knock pheasants out of the sky, never once binding to them but always hitting them as hard as his stature would allow. His most memorable flight was on a cock pheasant. I had already sent my wire haired Vizla on and he came onto a firm point. I unhooded the falcon, he muted, bobbed his head getting a good look at the dog and set off mounting quickly, making good use of those massive pectorals. He was soon up at what I considered to be his best pitch yet and I

the point. This is always very exciting and I can remember this as if it were yesterday. As the falcon came into position I commanded the dog to "get em up" and as he went in out came two pheasants with one of the two flying much higher than the other. It was this pheasant the falcon selected, he folded up and threw himself into a blistering vertical stoop and hit the pheasant so hard he killed it outright with a head shot. I made in and noticed the head of the pheasant was cracked open like a walnut, such was the force of the impact. I brought my dog in and we sat watching the falcon take his fill. I can

ber taking a sip from my hip flask and thinking "now this is falconry".

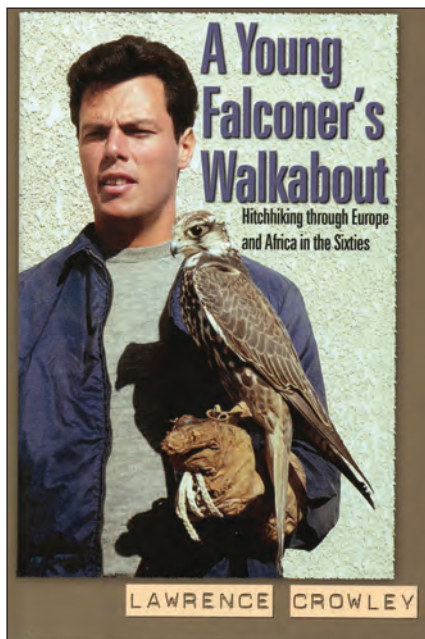
WoF. Do you find shows such as The Falconers Fair and The Falconry Festival serve as a worthwhile shop window for your work or do you think the audience is too narrow in its outlook?

Carl. As far as The Falconers Fair and Falconry Festival go both shows have been very successful for me and have been a good advertisement for my art both in this country and around the world and I hope will continue to do so in the future.



A Young Falconer's Walkabout

by Larry Crowley



This book is one that I personally found extremely difficult to review with a totally unbiased slant and to be able to approach it with a completely open mind. The reasons for this are the fact that the book was written in the period when I myself was starting to become active in falconry and the vast majority of falconers mentioned in it are or were known to me personally, or at least I had met them at some time or other. So to be wholly objective and not let my own memories colour my impressions of the book was not always easy but I can honestly say I have tried to be detached and review the book purely on its content.

The two hundred plus page book, which is illustrated with some fifty plus colour photos, concerns a young American falconer who in 1963 finishes his time in the Army in Germany and embarks on a fourteen month journey of discovery with falconry as its central theme. The author, through a combination of hitchhiking lifts and more conventional travel means, travels across Europe, the

of Africa and eventually visits Iceland before finally returning home to America. The book takes the form of extracts of a personal journal and accordingly can be somewhat tedious and of little interest to this particular reader. For me the meat of the book lay in the falconry content, not a young man's travelogue, but the latter is probably important to lay the foundation for the former. Given the political situation today throughout the world in general and Africa in particular any journey of this sort would now most certainly just not be possible.

The falconry observations related through the pages of this book are quite fascinating with the author meeting and hawking with many doyens of the day particularly in Germany and Africa with the highlights for me being the time spent with Jack Mavrogordato trapping and initially training falcons in the Sudan. This is then subsequently followed up in detail when the author comes to England and re-joins Mavro to hunt rooks on Salisbury Plains with the falcons they had trapped together in Africa. Here we can read of some very famous falcons and indeed falconers as the likes of Leonard Potter and Mavro hawk with "Venus" the Peregrine Falcon, "Pearl" the Lanner Falcon and "Shiva" the Saker Falcon. They are frequently joined by friends to enjoy their sport with the likes of Roger and Jean Upton, Michael and June Woodford, Cyril and Jan Morley, Geoffrey Pollard, Derek Moore, Sir Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, Steven Frank, General O'Carol Scott and many others. The list is endless and reads like a who's who of falconry.

The author finally heads on to Iceland to look at wild Gyrs before eventually returning to the States. The journey itself most certainly was an extremely interesting one and it gives a fascinating insight into how things were with regard to obtaining hawks almost fifty years ago. But there are several moments in this very personal recollection that cause the reader to ponder. Losing a Musket to another hawk because it was put on far too long a tether, throwing a falcon off at quarry whilst still hooded, not incidents designed to make a falconer comfortable reading this book. Also some form of proof reading with regard to people's names may well have been advisable.

Despite the little niggles that this book conjures up, I for one would still buy it and be happy to have it on my bookshelf. I feel that with the inaccuracies of the text and the falconry mishaps already mentioned aside the book has a great deal of merit and the hawking recollections of the Sudan and Salisbury Plain alone make it essential reading for a falconer of any generation.

The book is priced at £25 and is available from Coch-Y-Bonddu Books on 01654-702837 or visit www.angelbooks.com



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The British Falconers Club Eagle Meet

Dr. David Glynne Fox



Eagle Falconers

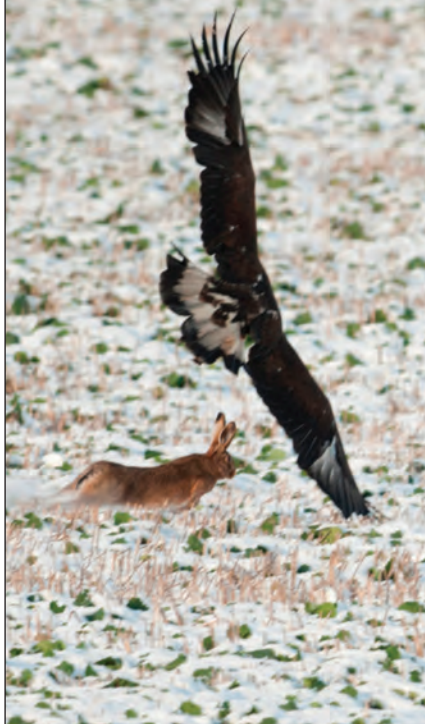
The planning for this event began way back in May 2010 when I attended the annual British Falconry Fair at Chetwynd Park, Shropshire. Here I had my feet in two camps simultaneously. Firstly, the recently formed and now largely defunct United Kingdom Eagle Falconry Association had set up a weathering ground, where I had my own eagles based and secondly, I had set up a photographic display of eagles in flight etc. in the British Falconers Club tent, in order to advertise the eagle field meet which I was scheduling for part the latter's Annual General Meeting to be held in late November 2010.

Only a few years ago, it would have been a very different story when attempting to put enough eagle falconers into the field to make a worthwhile meet, for few had even attempted this exacting branch of the sport of falconry, but how times change! In the Midland region of the British Falconers Club alone, we have seven



*Glyn Thompson's eagle attacking hare, Bunny, Notts.
2. Nov. 2010 © Peter Moonlight*

Roy Lupton's eagle Baby closing with a hare, Eakring, Notts. Nov. 2010
© Peter Moonlight



Roy Lupton's eagle Baby taking a hare at Eakring, Notts. Nov. 2010. © Peter Moonlight



members who fly Golden Eagles and it is a fact that this stunning eagle has been rapidly gaining in popularity as a bona fide falconer's bird. I have waited many years to see this as I have always known the prowess of this eagle, having flown them since the 1960's, but the fact is that this popularity may itself prove the downfall of eagle falconry because as the species becomes more readily available through captive breeding and imports from European countries, so the birds may well find themselves in inexperienced and unsuitable hands. By promoting eagle falconry at such events, it could be argued, that we are popularising eagle falconry too much perhaps, and there of course is some truth in this, but on the other hand, there is also the scenario that by experienced eagle falconers making themselves known can be viewed as a source of learning by those who are contemplating taking on an eagle for the first time, and in my view, if eagle falconry is to survive the misdoings of inex-

source of information is sorely needed. This is one of the main reasons that the even more recently formed British Eagle Hawking Club and the eagle sub group of the British Falconers Club was instigated. Both organisations now offer help and instruction, the first by website forum discussion initially and the second by example and website access, although the latter is of course intended for BFC members only. So why have two organisations when the number of eagle falconers in the UK is still relatively small? Firstly, it is a fact that although the British Falconers Club is the oldest and largest falconry organisation in these islands, there are many falconers who are not members, for whatever reasons and are thus, outside the remit of the BFC eagle sub group, whereas the British Eagle Hawking Club can be accessed by anyone. The advantage the BFC holds is that members benefit from public liability insurance, a Journal and two newsletters per year, hold regular regional meetings,

have a website and last but by no means least, have access to large areas of suitable hawking land where eagle meets can and already have been held.

It seemed a very short time from the Falconers Fair to the actual date of the annual general meeting, but in that time, much organisation had taken place. It would have been much easier had only the eagle meet taken place, but of course, venues had to be found for short-wings, broad-wings and long-wings too and this monumental task was allotted to a handful of falconers, headed by Martyn Standley and Martyn Furber, both members of the BFC Midland region who were hosting the event for the second consecutive year. The year 2010 would prove to be historic, for this was the very first time an eagle meet had been proposed for the AGM and I was selected to organise the eagle falconers who would be taking part. Several eagle falconers of my acquaintance were ineligible

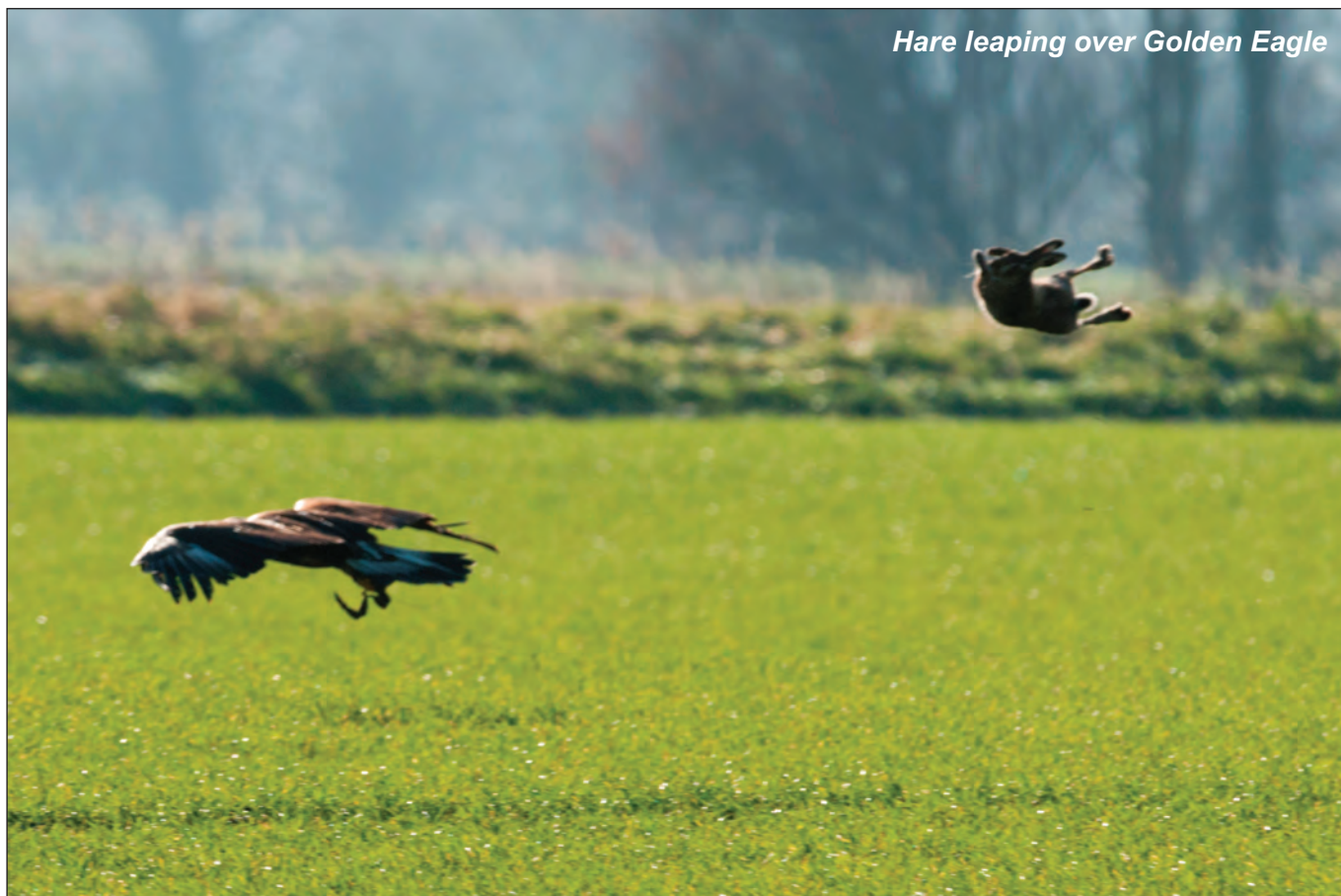
because unfortunately, they were not members of the BFC, and although non-members may appear as guests, they are not allowed to fly at BFC meets. Additionally, because this was a historic occasion in the club's history, I was asked if all the eagle falconers could meet up at the meet headquarters at the Riverside Hotel at Branston, near Burton on Trent for a photographic session, and this was duly arranged.

Due to the sad demise of Geoff Surtees's and Alan Walker's Golden Eagles just prior to the meet, this left me two short of the original eleven eagles earmarked for the two day event. Actually, eleven eagles is really too many, five or six being more realistic due to the fact that as we were flying by numbers, i.e. number one flying first, followed by number two etc., it can be a long time between slips for each falconer, especially if there is a shortage of quarry, and this did trouble me somewhat, not least because up until a few days

before the actual event took place, the venues were still not set in stone. We were due to fly the eagles on day one at Stanford Hall, near Rugby, but four days before we were due to appear, the message came through that the ground was now longer available because eighty per cent of the land had been ploughed and sown and the landowner did not want anyone trampling the ground. This threw us in a quandary, which resulted in a major reshuffle of the Goshawk and long wing groups. Fewer Goshawks than anticipated were actually going to be present, in fact there were almost as many Golden Eagles present as there were Goshawks, so this released some land for the eagle group for day two. Day one would now take place at our old haunts of Bunny, Nottinghamshire, where we had enjoyed two or three eagle field meets on previous occasions. So, at the eleventh hour, I was still worrying about venues and did not actually sort out the venue for day two until

flying! How close to the line can one get on a national event? I have to admit that, as eagle field meet co-ordinator, not knowing where we would be flying in a mere few hours time was disconcerting to say the least. I received many phone calls but was in no position to relay reliable information that I did not possess. In the end, it all turned out well, but it was certainly touch and go for a while. One of our Goshawk members, Gavin, eventually came to our rescue and gave up a day with the Goshawks to accompany the eagles, and I shall always remain grateful to him for this kind gesture, as we had a fantastic day.

The morning of the 26th November was heralded by a sharp frost and nil wind conditions, which was ideal for hunting with eagles. My son David and I set off for Branston before first light and were actually the first to arrive at the hotel prior to moving off to the flying grounds. I actually had to venture the furthest from the latter as



Hare leaping over Golden Eagle



I live barely a mile from Bunny, but as I had agreed to a photo shoot for the archives, I had little choice other than to drive forty miles in the opposite direction! After coffee and a bacon sandwich, during which time we saw the arrival of many falconers, including most of the expected eagle group, we stepped outside to gather for a group photograph. I must admit that all these eagles certainly looked very impressive. We even had a stunning Black, or Verreaux's Eagle which Geoff Surtees was training, although it would not be flying at the meet as he had only very recently collected the eagle, after his own female Golden Eagle had become electrocuted on a pylon. Roy Lupton, a well-known eagle falconer was late arriving from his home in Kent but phoned through to say he would join us in the field. As soon as the photo shoot was over, we returned our eagles to their respective travel boxes and set off for Bunny.

Day One:

As aforementioned, we were flying by numbers for safety reasons and I

suggested that those who were about to fly, should occupy a central position in the beating line to take full advantage of hares breaking either to the right or left. This was agreeable to all and so upon arrival at our destination, I placed several numbers in a hat and each eagle falconer drew his number. This was supposed to remain with each falconer throughout the duration of the meet, but within minutes, some had swapped numbers. Not that this mattered at all, so long as everyone was aware of the significance of their number and where they came in the slipping order. It all went like clockwork with every eagle falconer respecting the flying order, although at times, keeping the line straight proved rather trying, for several members of the field attended as guests and had scant ideas of how an eagle meet should be conducted. Sometimes, several guests grouped together chatting instead of keeping to their line positions, thus leaving gaps where crouching hares could remain hidden in their forms. At other times, the

tended to become straggled as some paid no attention to the position of those next in the line and either walked too far ahead, or lagged behind. It has to be said that the line was rather extended and it was sometimes difficult getting instructions across. We had planned to use short wave radio sets for this very reason, but they were forgotten, so I had little choice other than to keep shouting instructions when applicable. This of course did detract a little from the days' sport, but even so, I was still very grateful for the interest shown and the help given to all the eagle falconers by the remainder of the field.

Roy Lupton, Alan Walker and Derek Abbey were late arriving at Bunny and as the landowner desired us to begin before we lost the daylight hours, we began lining out ready for the flying to begin. The latter all joined us shortly. The eagle falconers were: Glyn Thompson, male Golden Eagle. Pete Sibson, male Golden Eagle. Chris Miller, female Golden Eagle. Wayne Chesterman,

Darren Hollis with Cuddles, Eakring, Nov. 2010. © Lee Webb



female Golden Eagle. Simon Tebutt, male Golden Eagle. David Glynne Fox, male Golden Eagle. Roy Lupton, two male Golden Eagles plus one Bonelli's Eagle. Gary Knight, male Golden Eagle.

I had drawn ticket number seven, so I had quite a wait until it was my turn to fly, but even so, as we walked the first field of winter wheat, several hares were put up and flying in earnest began. Both Pete Sibson's and Gary Knight's eagles put in a valiant effort, but the hares eluded them, as did Wayne Chesterman and Chris Miller, who was flying my old female Skye. There were not as many hares in this field as on previous meets and

the landowner, Roger Firse told me that he could smell chemicals, indicating that the farmer, whose land we had begun the drive on, must have sprayed the land very recently, hence the comparative lack of hares. However, my turn came and Star launched after a hare, which broke to my left and took off at high speed across the field. Star soon caught up with it and was about to strike, when the hare leapt skywards. It seemed initially that Star had struck it, but from the photographic evidence from Peter Moonlight, it appeared that the hare had committed its famous flying leap into the air, right into Star's flight path. The hare escaped unscathed, but what a flight! I treasure the im-

ages that Peter took of this flight. He was using a motordrive with fast exposure settings on a Nikon 500 mm telephoto lens, so that the action was frozen in time. In fact, Peter took some stunning images on this meet, some of which illustrate this article and I am grateful to Peter for his photographic expertise. He was a 2009 student on the MSc in Biological Imaging course held at the School of Biology, Nottingham University, in which I am also involved.

Another very close flight came from Roy Lupton's male eagle "Baby." This eagle is very adept at taking hares and had just returned from Scotland where he had taken several Blue, or Mountain Hares. Baby grabbed a hare after a good long flight, but somehow failed to keep a grasp and the hare made good its escape. We then walked up a field a deep plough, which I hate with a passion. It is often said that hares prefer the plough because they can easily hide in its ruts, but having now walked miles of plough, I think I can safely say that hares much prefer root crops. True, we have put up many hares in the plough, but nothing like the number as found on stubble and root crops. Additionally, hares find it almost as difficult to run on plough as we do walking on it and now that Buzzards and Goshawks are becoming more familiar, any hare using the plough is certainly placing itself at a disadvantage. We had to walk up a huge field of plough after the first wheat field and put up just one hare, which was not flown at. It was Wayne's turn and he considered that the distance was too far for his eagle, or to put it more accurately, his eagle was not happy with long slips, so she was held back. The hare made good its escape because the next in line to fly was in a disadvantaged position. Some eagles are like this, so I guess I am lucky with Star, for he will take on

Golden Eagle in flight, Eakring. Nov. 2010. © Lee Webb



sees a hare he wants to be off after it.

We then moved on down to the next farm in the line, where several eagles had some superb chases. Skye had pressed one hare which managed to escape by running into a hedge, so she had little choice other than to fly over the top of the hedge and take stand in a nearby tree, from where Chris called her down to the

gamekeeper suggested that we try a field of plough, but it was wet through with melting frost, which I felt would hold few, if any hares, so I suggested that we walk up a field of sugar beet that we had seen nearby. The sugar beet had proven most productive at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire a month earlier when I had attended the International Field Meet of the British Falconers Club, and where

taken two out of the five hares taken by eagles at that meet, so it was with much excitement that we entered this field. In seconds, we were putting up hares all over the place, for we had found the mother lode! Now flights were coming thick and fast and some very exciting flights ensued with yet more very near misses. The hares were using all of their famous evasive escape tactics and we were treated to some amazing flights, but the day drew to a close with no kills. This did not matter one jot, for the sport was of the highest order, which was enjoyed by eagle falconers and guests alike. Wayne had had to retire early due to a knee injury, so Darren Hollis took over the flying of Wayne's female eagle for day two. That evening was spent trying to locate the following day's venue, which was eventually pinned down at about nine pm. Thus instructions for meeting up the next morning had to be relayed to all participants at literally the aforementioned eleventh hour.



Roy Lupton's Golden Eagle being taken up from kill, Eakring. Nov. 2010. © Lee Webb

Triple Header

Mark Williams



Gyr Barbary on Gadwell

mere four minutes away. I head east to known duck ponds and am optimistic since each falcon is on weight and the day seems to be shaping up to be a nice sunny one. Strong winds are forecast but I should be done before they arrive.

First to fly is the tiercel anatum on a set up in a dug out beside a quiet highway with four teal swimming on it. These are dishonest quarry at best but I am banking upon both the size and the pitch of this tiercel to not intimidate the quarry. The tiercel has been going up real high and is difficult to track in the sky most days. His weight is down to 560 grams and I am seeing him tighten up in position now from his usual wide ranging style. He is up real good and I like the way he goes off flying far and wide to gain altitude then comes over still climbing. He is about a grand and I know he is wide but these teal and the dug out is big enough at about half an acre that getting them off without dogs is going to be tough. I dare not risk letting the hounds loose near the highway because that is inviting Murphy. I run

Some days just seem to go well and everything goes according to plan. Most of course do not for some reason or other, particularly when deadlines and obligations to be somewhere else within a time period create added pressure to fit in some hawking into our daily lives. Today was one of those days that seemed to go just right and I'd like to share it with you.

The season is in full swing and after ten days away attending three different falconry gatherings across two different provinces my hawks are in good form. I have my imprint Gyrkin back from the breeder for our duck season, a first year tiercel Gyr/Barbary and a recently acquired tiercel anatum Peregrine. Each falcon requires carefully selected set ups for their own particular reasons. This

was a tall order considering it does not get light until eight am and I have to be at work at eleven am. I prepare as best I can before I head out so that when I get home I can simply change and go to work which is a



Coal-Tiercel Anatum



Mulligan the Gyrkin

to add to the effect and get a sudden clean flush. Off they go and out across the stubble. I dare not look up to locate the tiercel but focus instead on ensuring the ducks get off and keep going. I know he is coming down now as I see the teal turn in panic. They don't have time and he comes into my peripheral vision and whacks a teal down in a sharp turn. He stalls his throw up and is down on his prize. What a nice flight and nice to see it go so well and I was particularly impressed with how as a young inexperienced tiercel he managed to manoeuvre to address a potential oncoming strike. He gets a good crop as tomorrow we fly late, if at all.

Next is the Gyrkin, he is up around 1090 grams and eager to go. A difficult set up with a large body of water that is long and elongated. All three dogs are brought out to help this time. The Gyrkin goes up nicely and I drive towards the slough. Up go the ducks and as predicted they do not break out over land, instead the chase goes on for a while and I realise that no duck is going to make the mistake of breaking out over land. Unfortunately there are no mal-

lards in the flock. I gather up two of the closer dogs and jump in the truck and drive to nearby water with more ducks on it. The third dog soon follows and I jump out to control the flush. I do not see the Gyrkin in the sky but as a white falcon he is hard to see anyway. The first wave of ducks go and I look for signs of the Gyrkin or the ducks detecting the Gyrkin. Still no sign as a second wave of ducks leave. Then suddenly they are spread in a line heading back to the water I just came from when I see the Gyrkin racing across the sky. He lines up on a gadwall and

knock it down and a quick throw up then he is on his prize. Two for two and things are looking good for finding a third flight for my Gyr/Barbary as I have a good sized pond that is nearby.

Sure enough there are two lonely gadwall on the pond; much less than expected but still a good set up. I drive up the road way past the pond and release the tiercel hybrid. I walk up with three dogs at heel. The hybrid is up nicely but not as nice as the tiercel anatum. I estimate he is over 800 feet and still climbing when I send in the dogs. Two ducks on this water can pose a problem but gadwalls are usually honest to the flush. Sure enough both head out and I look up and see the tiercel roll over pumping all the way down. He corrected several times as he lined up on the duck as it headed out across the open stubble. A hit and throw up and he struggled a little on the ground but soon had the duck under control. Last night he had taken a drake mallard and taken a bit of a beating. He needed this confidence boost and so he too was going to get a good crop. I allowed him to kill the duck and break in. The dogs meanwhile soon got too pushy and were trying to eat his duck as the accompanying photograph shows.

Photographs supplied by canadianwildlifephotography.com



Wallace and the dogs sharing

Saints or Sinners, Heroes or Villains (continued)

Tiercel

Harris Hawks and hybrid falcons have possibly done more than anything else to change the face of modern falconry, particularly in Europe. The who, what and when of Harris Hawks first coming to Europe is very well documented but I don't think anybody could have ever possibly seen, some forty years ago, the astonishingly rapid spread of their popularity. Now they easily outnumber several fold any other species of trained raptor currently employed by falconers. Not only that they are also the number one hawk amongst those that give flying displays, do hawk walks and experience days. In fact if it wasn't for the Harris Hawk and its unique sociable nature it is extremely doubtful whether half of those offering hawk walks and the like would be in a position to do so.

The Harris Hawk has several features which does make it an ideal hawk for falconry. It is by nature a hawk that tends to live in family groups and therefore quite readily accepts the falconer as what it considers the alpha hawk in their particular partnership. It is intelligent with an exceptionally good memory, powerful for its size and tenacious when hunting. The oft quoted remark that it is easy to train is surely a very misleading one but certainly training a Harris Hawk is, in my opinion, without doubt less stressful than training a Red Tailed Hawk or Goshawk. Consequently the novice falconer, and even the not so novice falconer, can end up with a hawk that will hunt efficiently and flatter the efforts of its owner to deceive. There is another oft quoted remark concerning Harris

Hawks that runs along the lines of "if it weren't for Harris Hawks then ninety per cent of falconers would never have caught anything". Obviously this is a very general and sweeping remark that grossly exaggerates the truth. But as with so many remarks of this nature the nub of the saying holds a grain of truth. Many people who take the field with a Harris Hawk probably have only ever taken wild quarry because of the intelligence and tenacity of the hawk.

I have seen many a hawking day where the owner of the Harris Hawk in question was proud of his charge and took quarry with it. The reality of the day was in fact that the hawk went from tree to tree looking for quarry and the falconer followed the hawk as opposed to how it should



Harris Hawk



Falconer with Harris Hawk

be. Many years ago a supposedly relatively prominent figure in the world of falconry invited me to go hawking with him and his cast of female Harris Hawks. We drew up and parked close to the edge of a very large mature broad leaf woodland. The first female Harris was taken from her transport box, had her jesses changed and telemetry fitted and was then cast off into a tree. Then the process was repeated with the second hawk. When I made to follow the direction the hawks had taken I was told there was no rush and just relax for a few minutes. After a coffee from the flask it was out with the telemetry set and we walked in the direction the signals were coming from. A few minutes later we came upon both hawks on a rabbit. They were taken up off of the kill and then allowed to proceed. We then followed a few minutes later and eventually, by the use of telemetry, found them on a cock pheasant. The owner was delighted with what he considered his sport and undeniably a pheasant and rabbit were in the bag. But we had not seen any of the flying and certainly at no point were in control of the situation. This to me was far from being practical falconry and could not have happened with any other species of raptor.

The Harris Hawk breeds extremely readily in the domestic situation and so many of those that fly these hawks try to get them paired up and breeding so as to sell the young and make a little money from their sport. This has led over the years to an incredible amount of Harris Hawks being brought by those that should really never have a hawk of any description. Over the years I genuinely have lost count of the number of Harris Hawks I have had to re-home or try and sort major behavioural problems out so that they could still be handled. On the re-homing side of things some cases have been extremely



Male Harris Hawk

straight forward in that the falconer concerned has had their circumstances changed dramatically with the result they can no longer keep their hawk as they would wish. But I have also had several, and I do mean several, where I have been told by the owner of the hawk that if I can't take it they will simply let it go. Reasons given for contemplating such actions were that the owner was bored or didn't think falconry was what they expected and even they hadn't realised they would have to look after the hawk every single day. Behavioural problems have been many and varied starting at straight forward things like a dislike of dogs through to attacking anyone but the owner of the hawk. Most can be worked through once the cause of the problem is understood but in two cases, both involving hawks that showed a tendency to attack people, nothing was resolved. The frightening thing is that the owners in both cases decided to use the female hawks concerned for breeding rather than, as they put it, waste them. Surely this is just about the last thing that should be done with them.

The Harris Hawk is a tremendous asset to falconry and an extremely versatile and worthwhile hunting hawk. However with so many being flown by those who, if it were not for the Harris Hawk, would not normally ever fly a hawk, accidents and incidents are bound to happen and a number of these will get picked up and then sensationalised by the press. The ensuing press coverage then has a tendency to reflect badly on all falconers. There have been a great many examples in just the past few months and I personally know of one falconer with serious damage to his sight because a badly raised female Harris belonging to someone else tried to grab him in the face. Unfortunately with more and more Harris Hawks being bred the prices for



them are getting lower and ever lower and this in itself causes its own problems. If a hawk had a relatively high value placed upon it then it would tend to get purchased by someone that really wanted it and had planned its purchase for some time and accordingly was equipped to receive it. But with prices plummeting and it now being possible to pick up a male Harris for less than would be spent on an average night out it is all too easy for a hawk to be brought as the result of a whim or moment of fancy.

The Harris Hawk is, in my opinion, a superb hunting hawk and an ideal hawk for falconry but surely it deserves to be treated with a little more

joy. For every falconer that puts a great deal of effort into the training, husbandry and hunting of his or her Harris Hawk there seems to be an even greater number that think of these hawks as either playthings or tools. I know of a case recently where a respected falconer was contacted for advice by some young lads who had purchased a Harris Hawk and were disappointed that it wasn't catching rabbits. The hawk would instantly re-act when a rabbit was flushed but would simply give up after a few yards and sit on the ground. The Hawk was taken to the falconer and two things were discovered in very short order. Firstly the hawk was on its knees in terms of condition. The seller had told the

hawk doesn't kill don't feed it. Secondly the poor hawk had half its wing missing on one side. It had suffered wing tip oedema and lost the primaries as a result. The lads took the hawk back to the seller and were told the hawk was moulting!!

The Harris Hawk is without doubt an excellent hawk but it is also a double edged addition to falconry. There are those that would say the popularity of the Harris Hawk has brought falconry to the attention of the public like no other hawk before it. Which statement would be a very difficult thing to argue with. With the growth of falconry flying displays, experience days and the like the Harris Hawk is being brought to a very wide audience and they in turn are made aware that falconry is a living thing and not just something that has been confined to the history books. The other side unfortunately is that most negative incidents concerning hawks that are brought to the attention of the public, through the media, involve Harris Hawks. Whilst the Harris Hawk may be the saviour of modern falconry incidents concerning its usage, by those incapable of training them properly, could well lead to if not its demise then certainly draconian legislation against falconry.

To be continued.....

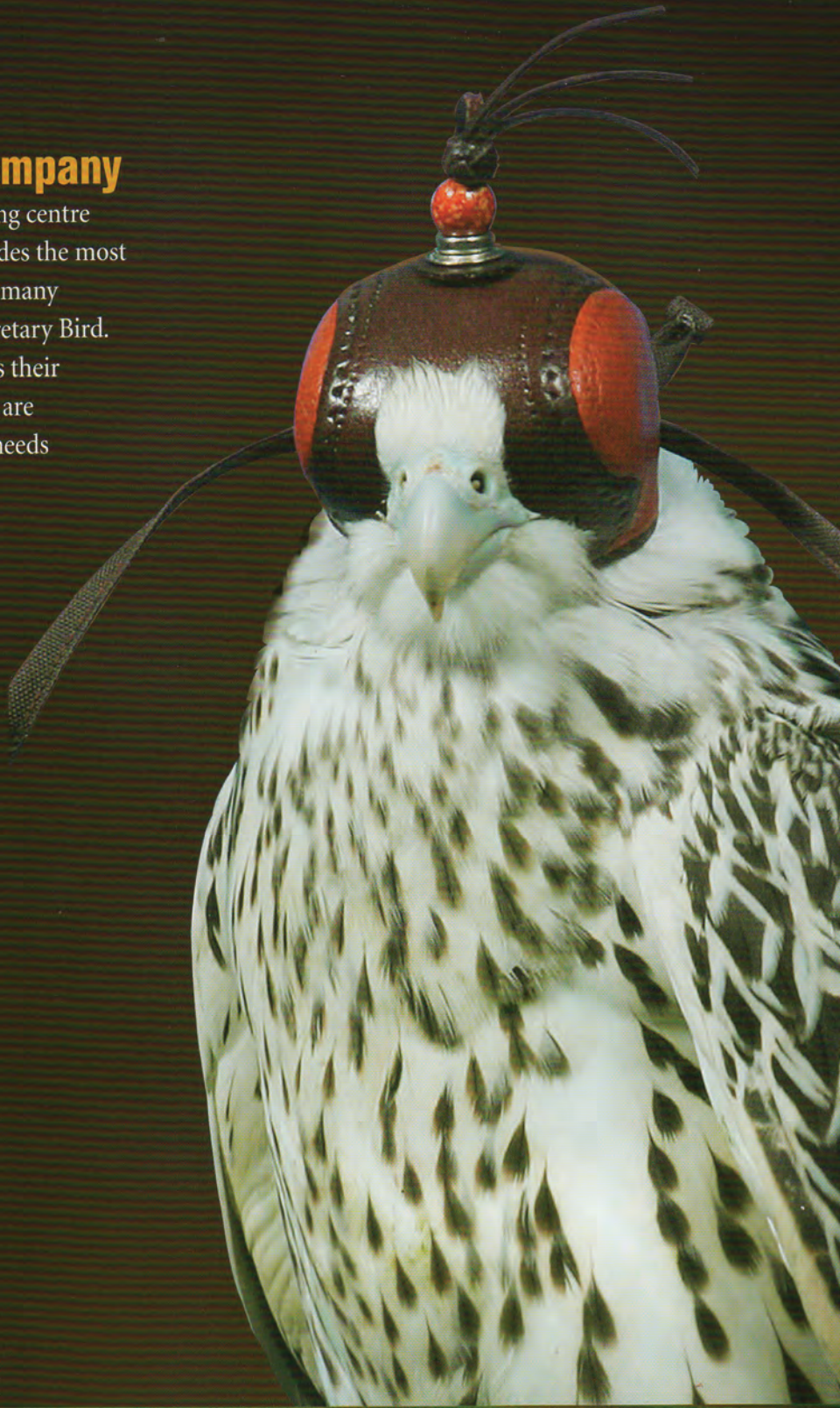


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